

INTRODUCTION

Aristotle set the terms for rhetoric over 2500 years ago. Classical rhetoric established a powerful, useful, and enduring set of concepts for producing and critically evaluating persuasive statements in the public sphere. Its concepts provide means of reflective understanding and choice-making relevant for the class of language productions it arose from—namely high stakes, public, oral performances on matters of deliberative and judicial governance and occasions of commitment to state enterprises. As a consequence of the success of the institutions it reflected on, modern institutions of governance have tended to rely on and replicate the forms of citizenship embodied in classical rhetoric, thereby giving enduring relevance to rhetorical categories.

Yet the world imagined by rhetoric is far from the whole social and communicative world. Even in ancient Greece and Rome, the same agora where rhetoric was established contained discursive worlds of sales and contracts. And when rhetors went home, they engaged in a variety of familial and intimate discourses. All of these would have gained from a reflective understanding and informed choice making, but they were not the subject of rhetorical theorizing. Furthermore, institutions and forms of social participation have expanded greatly in the last two millennia, in large part fostered by the affordances of literacy. The presence of literacy over the last five thousand years has given rise to many new genres, has transformed social life, and has given rise to new forms of social organization dependent on writing as a communicative infrastructure, a repository of knowledge, and as a collection or recorded commitments. Academic work, scientific disciplines, and government bureaucracies are held together by the reading and writing of texts. Only a small part of these texts could conveniently be labeled as persuasive in any traditional sense. Even law (which in the courtroom can be seen as paradigmatic of rhetoric) now is much a matter of libraries, filings, briefs, and case files as it is of dramatic courtroom oratory.

At the end of chapter one of the companion volume, *A Rhetoric of Literate Action*, I rapidly reviewed the history of rhetorical theory's attempts to address the problematics of writing and produce a workable rhetoric to guide us in navigating the literate world. I concluded there that we still have yet to reconceive rhetoric fundamentally around the problems of written communication rather than around rhetoric's founding concerns of high stakes, agonistic, oral public persuasion.

A further reason to rethink rhetoric is the emergence of social science over the past century, to provide us new understandings of individuals and societies,

and how individuals interact and participate in societies. The social sciences now provide strong tools to reconceive what it is we accomplish through writing and how we go about accomplishing it. In this volume I explicitly present the conceptual grounds for the theory I propose in terms of major schools of contemporary social scientific thought. Most basically, I draw on sociocultural psychology, phenomenological sociology, and the pragmatic tradition of social science. Based on an account of human sociality and communication that arises at the intersection of these, I consider the kinds of orders embodied in texts and on which texts rely—social, linguistic, textual, and psychological. I particularly attend to the problem of communication across time and space among humans who biologically evolved social and communicative capacities in face-to-face activities. With the emergence of literacy as part of human cultural evolution, new kinds of relations and activities formed that have created structures of participation in larger and more distant organizations, relying on accumulating knowledge and mediated through genre-shaped texts. It is for these activity contexts that individuals must produce texts, mobilizing the resources of language, and it is within these contexts that the texts will have their effect. Near the end of the book, at the end of Chapter 10, I summarize the theoretical path traveled in the book in a way that can also serve to guide us on the way:

1. developmental theories of self and consciousness arising in social interaction saturated with language in order for social creatures to seek life needs and satisfactions;
2. phenomenological sociology, which finds the emergent order of everyday social activity resting on processes of typification and recognizability;
3. pragmatic theories of self and society, seeing self, society, institutions, language, and meaning constantly being transformed to meet human needs;
4. structurational sociology, which sees larger structuring of events and relations emerging interactionally from the local actions and attributions of participants;
5. anthropological and psychological studies of discourse practices as situated, distributed, and mediated;
6. speech act theory, which sees utterances going beyond conveying meaning to making things happen in the social world;
7. theories of discourse as dialogic, situated, and heteroglossic; and
8. a rhetoric oriented to content, purpose, and situation as well as form and style.

While this theory may make some conceptual breaks with the rhetorical tradition in its focus on the problematics of writing and its grounding in contemporary social science, I still draw on many of the founding concepts of

rhetoric, which are discussed throughout both volumes. More importantly, I maintain a commitment to the practical rhetorical project of providing tools for reflective, strategic use of language. I hope that others will entertain the new concepts offered here as within the rhetorical tradition, but providing a new direction for the way forward as we begin to address the practical needs of composing communications in new media. To do that, however, we must first come to terms with the world of writing which has become infrastructural for modern society, even as modern society is venturing into new digital ways of being.

I have been working on these two volumes in one form or another for a quarter-century, with two early promissory notes sketching early versions of the theory and the need for it (Bazerman 1994a, 2000a). It has been a struggle to tell the theory of these two volumes clearly while still respecting the complexity of writing. To accomplish this, I have made some choices. In order to maintain focus on the underpinnings of the theory proposed, I have not engaged with a full discussion of the rhetorical tradition, but rather have used concepts from the tradition as they are usefully integrated into the theory I propose. Similarly, while there has been extensive contemporary research in writing studies, I have cited such research only insofar as it aids the exposition of the theory, even though much research could be cited in empirical support. I have discussed these findings extensively in my other publications and have aided their dissemination in numerous sites, including the *Handbook of Research on Writing* (Bazerman, 2008) and several book series I have edited.

This and the companion volume can be read separately. While there is, I hope, consistency across the exposition of practical considerations in the *Rhetoric of Literate Action* and the theoretical exposition of this *Theory of Literate Action*, there is no one-to-one correspondence of the chapters, as each book follows its own logic. Nonetheless, some core concepts of the former volume do have fuller expositions in specific chapters of this volume. The issues of spatial and temporal location raised in chapters two and three of the *Rhetoric* and motivated social action in chapters five and six of the *Rhetoric* are examined extensively throughout the first seven chapters of this volume, as I present the location and situated action choices within communication at a distance as the fundamental problems of writing. Genre, which helps solve these problems, appears throughout both volumes but has its most explicit treatment in Chapters 2 and 8 of the *Rhetoric* and Chapters 3, 4, and 10 in this volume. The role and nature of intertextuality discussed in Chapters 4 and 9 of the *Rhetoric* are the topic of Chapter 10 here. The problem of representation of meaning in Chapter 9 of the *Rhetoric*, here is addressed in Chapters 9 and 10. The temporal experience of texts discussed in Chapter 10 of the *Rhetoric* is here theorized in

Chapter 10. Style presented in Chapter 11 of the *Rhetoric* is examined from the linguistic perspective in Chapter 8 here. The issues of writing processes and the accompanying emotional and cognitive issues considered in Chapters 10 and 12 of the rhetoric receive theoretical treatment here in Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 11.

As with the companion volume, I am deeply grateful to the many, many people over the years I have learned from, shared ideas with, and worked with as I struggled to make sense of the complexities of writing. Most recently, for their thoughtful reviewing of the latter stages of this manuscript, I thank Anis Bawarshi, Joshua Compton, Christiane Donahue, David Russell, Sandra Thompson, and the anonymous reviewers of the WAC Clearinghouse. Finally, I could not have come to these thoughts on writing without the good fortune of having met a partner over forty years ago who shares the passion and adventure of writing, Shirley Geoklin Lim.